

January 1, 2006, and it is a voluntary program.

We will issue a prescription drug card which will be offered to beneficiaries from January 1, 2004, through at least January 1, 2006, 6 months after the prescription drug benefit plan is implemented. The prescription drug plan will be implemented on January 1, 2004.

The drug benefit with the Medicare Part D is a Medicare Program. At least two stand-alone drug plans must be offered in each region. All Medicare beneficiaries will be able to participate. Those who remain in traditional Medicare will have a drug benefit equal to those who go into the new Medicare Advantage Program, formerly known as Medicare+Choice. Beneficiaries will be offered either standard drug coverage or drug coverage that is an actuarial equivalent to the standard drug plan. Either drug plan will be available to those remaining in traditional Medicare or those who begin the Medicare Advantage Program, this new program.

The national average of monthly premiums for the drug benefit will be \$35 per month in 2006. All drug plans will have mandatory deductibles and beneficiary out-of-pocket cost-sharing limits.

Every beneficiary will have a choice between three prescription drug plans. The Medicare Advantage Program will offer either a PPO option or an HMO option. A stand-alone drug benefit will be offered to beneficiaries remaining in traditional Medicare. A maximum of three Medicare Advantage PPO plans will be offered per region. They will compete for the opportunity and the privilege of serving the people in that particular region. Health and Human Services will certify all of these drug plans before they are offered to Medicare beneficiaries. In any event, they will be offered to all Medicare beneficiaries, seniors and disabled.

I was a member of the tripartisan group last year that put forth the tripartisan plan. Had we not done that, we wouldn't be as far along today as we are. I have to say I was proud to be a member of that tripartisan plan, along with Senators GRASSLEY, SNOWE, BREAUX, and JEFFORDS. There were five of us. We took on that assignment, and we came up with a lot of ideas that have been improved upon in this bill. This was a very important bill.

There is no easy solution in these areas. In spite of the desire of some to have simple private sector solutions, those are not in the cards with the votes we have in the Senate today or in the near future, I have to say as well.

This bill is as close as we can go towards having two completely different but nevertheless useful options: traditional Medicare for those who do not want to leave, but this new Medicare Advantage for those who really want to try something different where they may have advantageous benefits over time.

We believe the competition fostered by this bill is going to be good competi-

tion, that it should help to keep costs down. But, most importantly, we believe all seniors should have a right to prescription drug benefits, and this plan will give it to them.

We will have lots of crying and moaning and groaning about different ideas around here, some of which I might like just as much as what we have in here, but we could not get them done. So we have come together in the art of the doable to get a bill that literally gives both sides of these options a chance to be able to excel and do better for our senior citizens. That is important. That is real important. This bill is important. It is the first time in history we have done this. Frankly, a \$400 billion bill over 10 years is a very important bill that will do an awful lot of good for our seniors and for those who really are hard up in our society and for those who have to do without food or split their pills or do any number of things in order to be able to get the medications they need.

I am proud of this bill. Each one of us probably could, if we were dictators, come up with what we think might even be a better bill. But, fortunately, that isn't the way this representative republic works. We have to work within the framework of the Congress. Sometimes that is a messy, mixed up, sometimes very inefficient method of legislating, but, in the end, this country has survived because we have the greatest form of government in the history of the world. And this process, as sloppy as it might be from time to time is bringing about a bill that will do an awful lot of good for an awful lot of seniors in our society at a time when they need it the most.

I just hope we can reduce the number of amendments and get this bill passed as soon as we can, get together with the House in a conference, and, of course, come up with a final package that, hopefully, will even be improved that will take us throughout this next century in a way that will protect our seniors and those who have suffered for want of pharmaceutical prescription drugs.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. AL-EXANDER). The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. MCCAIN pertaining to the submission of S. Res. 173 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Submitted Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky is recognized.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I note the presence of the Senator from Kentucky. I ask unanimous consent to engage him in a 2- or 3-minute dialog.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I am pleased to note that, thanks to the efforts of millions of people all over the world, ASEAN, in a radical departure from their previous practice, has called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. I thank the Senator for his sponsorship of the legislation that I think may have had some beneficial effect. We obviously don't know all the factors that went into it, except to note also that people all over the world have been aroused on behalf of this great and truly good person. I thank the Senator from Kentucky for his efforts on her behalf.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Arizona. I think he is the only person I know who has actually been in the presence of Suu Kyi. I am sure the Senator shares my view that the mere act of letting her out is a long way from where the two of us hope they will end up.

What the junta needs to do is a lot more than simply end the house arrest, but give her and her duly elected party an opportunity to assume the power that they won 13 years ago in an honest election. So it is a step in the right direction. I am sure my friend from Arizona agrees that we have a long way to go.

Mr. MCCAIN. I thank the Senator.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I was just going to wrap up. I see my friend from Alaska here. How long does the Senator expect to speak?

Mr. STEVENS. I really could not say.

Mr. MCCONNELL. May I do the wrap-up and then allow the Senator from Alaska to make his comments? The wrap-up is rather short, I believe.

Mr. STEVENS. May I inquire, did the Senator from Kentucky just cosponsor that amendment?

Mr. MCCONNELL. No. Mr. President, I did not cosponsor the amendment. We were just talking about Burma. Senator MCCAIN and I were talking about Burma. The expression on the face of the Senator from Alaska was one of alarm. I want to reassure him that I certainly did not cosponsor the resolution.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LET'S NOT FORGET CAMBODIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Secretary of State Colin Powell is in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for an annual ASEAN meeting. There are many issues he needs to pursue with ASEAN members, including, most urgently, support for the struggle for freedom in Burma.

Also pressing is the fate of democracy in Cambodia. Secretary Powell